
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Landmark/District:	Joel Elias Spingarn High School	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	801 26th Street, NE	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
Meeting Date:	May 2, 2013	<input type="checkbox"/> Concept
Case Number:	13-004	<input type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Andrew Lewis	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
		<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition

On April 4, 2013, the Historic Preservation Review Board unanimously approved the concept for the streetcar car barn and training center that the District of Columbia Department of Transportation (DDOT) proposes to construct on the site of Spingarn High School. Rather than delegating final design development to staff, however, the Board identified a few refinements for further study and requested another opportunity to review how the designs might be revised in light of these recommendations.

DDOT and ZGF Architects have considered the Board's comments and are prepared to address those which relate specifically to the development of the site. A response to the Board's architectural and landscape-related comments will be provided at a future date.

Property Description

Constructed in 1951-1952 and based upon a design by municipal architect Nathan C. Wyeth, Spingarn was the first senior high school built for African American students in the school district in thirty-six years and the last post-war school to be constructed in the Colonial Revival Style. Based upon the significance of its architectural style, history and picturesque, campus-like setting, Spingarn was designated a DC landmark on November 29, 2012.

Proposal

Although the majority of the Board's comments were complimentary and endorsed the "Scheme 1 – Vertical/Civic" alternative, a few aspects of the site development proposal were singled out for further study. Specifically, the Board inquired whether all of the tracks to the north of the facility and all of the proposed parking spaces were essential. The Board also asked that consideration be given to potentially setting the facility back so that it would align with Spingarn's primary elevation. The importance of accurately depicting the poles and wires that form the Overhead Catenary System (OCS) was also emphasized so that their visual impact could be fully understood and properly evaluated.

Due to project phasing, planned future expansions, and the number of cars required, DDOT maintains that all of the proposed tracks are essential. And since streetcar hours will coincide with those of Metro Bus and Metro Rail, it is likely that approximately half of the employees may have to drive to work. As such, the currently proposed one parking space per two employees appears to meet anticipated demand.

In response to comments regarding the siting of the facility, DDOT reconsidered the “test fit” scenarios that were evaluated earlier in consultation with staff from HPO and CFA. One of these scenarios proposed locating the car barn further to the west in deference to views of Spingarn, but was dismissed because it would cause the tracks and OCS infrastructure to become more visible by virtue of being located “in front” of the facility. Although a less dramatic shift to the west might not necessarily produce the same undesirable result, it would require a significant reconfiguration of the track layout and access to the site. For these reasons, and in order to maintain some relationship with the overall campus plan (i.e. alignment with Brown), DDOT continues to consider the currently proposed siting as the most appropriate.

The visual effects of the OCS infrastructure remain one of the most challenging components of the proposal, but DDOT has updated its illustrations to more accurately reflect how the poles and wires are likely to appear. They have also provided examples of how the visual impact of such systems has been minimized in other cities and they intend to continue investigating further improvements to the OCS system that will be shared with the Board.

Evaluation

Although further study did not result in any substantial revisions to the previously submitted site design, the reasons for maintaining the existing proposal appear to be sound. And as indicated above, an opportunity for the Board to review architectural and landscape-related refinements will be provided in the future.

Recommendation

The staff recommends that the Board:

- *find the site development-related aspects of the car barn design consistent with the purposes of the preservation act; and*
- *defer further comment on the architectural and landscape-related aspects of the design until the applicant has had sufficient time to develop appropriate responses to the Board’s comments.*